

Message Text

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ORIGIN SS-30

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EXDIS TOSEC 354

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR

SUBJECT: HANCOCK TASK FORCE

1. FOLLOWING INR ASSESSMENT PROVIDED FOR YOUR INFORMATION
ON ABOVE SUBJECT:

A. SOVIET RESPONSE

FOR NEARLY FIVE MONTHS PRIOR TO OCTOBER 30, SOVIET
NAVAL STRENGTH IN INDIAN OCEAN CONSISTED OF APPROXIMATELY
ELEVEN SHIPS INCLUDING: ONE DESTROYER, TWO DESTROYER ES-
CORTS, ONE LST, FOUR MINESWEEPERS, TWO OILERS, AND ONE
F-CLASS DIESEL-POWERED ATTACK SUBMARINE. THE SOVIETS ALSO
HAD SOME SEVEN AUXILIARY VESSELS IN AREA. THE COMPOSITION
OF THIS GROUP, AS OF NOVEMBER 9, REMAINS THE SAME.

WHEN THE HANCOCK TASK FORCE MOVED INTO THE INDIAN
OCEAN, IT WAS FOLLOWED BY THE SOVIET DESTROYER, LST, TWO
OILERS, ONE MINESWEEPER, AND THE F-CLASS SUBMARINE. THE
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DESTROYER WAS MOST RECENTLY SIGHTED SIX NAUTICAL MILES
FROM THE USS HANCOCK. THE TWO SOVIET DESTROYER ESCORTS
HAVE TAKEN UP HOLDING PATTERNS CONSIDERABLY FARTHER AWAY,
OFF THE MALDIVE ISLANDS, AND SOCOTRA ISLAND, RESPECTIVELY.

ON NOVEMBER 3, IN WHAT THE NAVY BELIEVES IS AN ATTEMPT TO BALANCE THE HANCOCK TASK FORCE, A SVERDLOV-

CLASS CRUISER AND A GUIDED MISSILE FRIGATE DEPARTED FROM THE SEA OF JAPAN FOR THE SOUTH CHINA SEA. AT ITS PRESENT RATE OF 12-15 KNOTS, THIS GROUP SHOULD ARRIVE IN THE HANCOCK HOLDING AREA AROUND NOVEMBER 18 OR 19. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE OF ANY SOVIET NUCLEAR SUBMARINES HEADING FOR THE PERSIAN GULF. NEITHER HAS THERE BEEN ANY EVIDENCE OF TU-95 RECONNAISSANCE FLIGHTS OVER HANCOCK TASK FORCE.

IF SOVIETS WISH TO AUGMENT THEIR PRESENCE IN INDIAN OCEAN, THEY HAVE CONSIDERABLE RESOURCES UPON WHICH TO DRAW IN THEIR PACIFIC FLEET. THIS INCLUDES TWO GUIDED MISSILE CRUISERS, TWO GUIDED MISSILE FRIGATES, AND A GUIDED MISSILE DESTROYER. THE TRANSIT TIME FOR ALL OF THESE, HOWEVER, WOULD BE FIFTEEN TO SIXTEEN DAYS.

B. OFFICIAL AND PRESS REACTION - DEPLOYMENT OF HANCOCK TASK FORCE TO THE INDIAN OCEAN HAS EVOKED CRITICAL PRESS COMMENTARY FROM SEVERAL LITTORAL COUNTRIES. THE MOST NEGATIVE REACTION, THOUGH NOT PUBLIC, WAS EXPRESSED BY SAUDI FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL WHO SAID HIS GOVERNMENT WAS VERY MUCH AWARE OF AND IRRITATED BY THE CARRIER'S PRESENCE AND BELIEVED IT A SIGN OF US MILITARY PRESSURE ON GULF STATES FOLLOWING IMPOSITION OF THE OIL EMBARGO.

THERE HAS BEEN AN OFFICIAL OBJECTION FROM TANZANIA. HOWEVER, OVERALL LEVEL AND TONE OF THESE CRITICAL COMMENTS HAS BEEN RELATIVELY RELAXED AND LOW-KEYED. NEGATIVE PRESS REACTION IN BANGLADESH, INDIA, INDONESIA, KENYA, MALAGASY REPUBLIC, AND MALAYSIA HAS FOCUSED IN SUCH ISSUES AS INTRODUCTION OF GREAT POWER RIVALRY INTO THE INDIAN OCEAN, THAT THE TRANSIT WOULD NOT FACILITATE KEEPING SECRET

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INDIAN OCEAN A ZONE OF PEACE, AND THAT THIS MIGHT BE A US PRESSURE TACTIC ON OIL PRODUCING ARAB COUNTRIES. AFTER INITIAL RASH OF NEWS STORIES AND COMMENT, HOWEVER, THE PRESS SEEMS TO HAVE MOVED ON TO OTHER ISSUES AND HANCOCK SEEMS TO BE ALMOST A DEAD STORY.

OFFICIAL TANZANIAN OBJECTION WAS LATER CLARIFIED TO SHOW THAT TANZANIAN OBJECTIONS EXTEND TO NAVAL VESSELS OF ANY OTHER MAJOR POWER. HOWEVER, TANZANIAN OFFICIALS SAID THAT SOVIET NAVAL PRESENCE COULD BE DISTINGUISHED FROM US PRESENCE BECAUSE USSR IS HELPING TO OUST LAST VESTIGES OF COLONIALISM FROM SOUTHERN AFRICA.

LACK OF OFFICIAL INDIAN OBJECTION IS SOMEWHAT NOTICEABLE, GIVEN NEW DELHI'S REACTION TO USS ENTERPRISE DEPLOY-

MENT IN DECEMBER 1971. SEGMENTS OF INDIAN PRESS DID
REPORT TASK FORCE DEPLOYMENT IN TERMS OF "LATEST
US GUNBOAT DIPLOMACY," BUT EXTENT OF OFFICIAL REACTION
WAS A COMMENT BY INDIAN FOREIGN MINISTER THAT THE TRANSIT
DID NOT PROMOTE PEACE IN AREA.

ELSEWHERE AMONG THE LITTORAL COUNTRIES, FOREIGN
MINISTER MALIK ADMONISHED OUR AMBASSADOR IN JAKARTA FOR
NOT GIVING NOTIFICATION OF THE TRANSIT OF THE STRAIT OF
MALACCA. MALIK'S COMMENT SEEMED DIRECTED MORE AT IN-
DONESIAN TERRITORIAL SEA CLAIMS THAN AT GREAT POWER
PRESENCE.

PAKISTAN AND IRAN HAVE BEEN SILENT.

SOVIET UNION DID NOT OFFICIALLY COMMENT, BUT COM-
MUNIST PARTY NEWSPAPER PRAVDA PUBLISHED WITHOUT COMMENT
REPORTS OF PROTEST IN INDIA, TANZANIA, AND MALAGASY
REPUBLIC. REACTION BY PRC APPEARS TO BE LIMITED TO RE-
PLAY WITHOUT COMMENT BY NEW CHINA NEWS AGENCY OF A
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TANZANIAN NEWSPAPER ARTICLE CONDEMNING GREAT POWER NAVAL
BUILDUP IN INDIAN OCEAN.

REACTION IN WESTERN EUROPE APPEARED TO BE LIMITED TO
STRAIGHT REPORTING OF THE FACTS. OFFICIALLY THE BRITISH
HAVE EXPRESSED TO US, BOTH HERE AND IN LONDON, DESIRE
TO BE MORE FULLY BRIEFED ON THE PURPOSE OF THE HANCOCK
DEPLOYMENT, IN VIEW OF THEIR ASSISTANCE IN PROVIDING
REFUELING AND P-3 ACCESS TO DIEGO GARCIA. RUSH

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